

INTRODUCTORY

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701 Some were left free to look after land, and even those who were
423 posted on guard duties were posted near their fields.

423 *Jamma* tenure conferred a double prestige on the holder in
554 addition to the undoubted economic advantage. It signified that
the holder had his roots in Coorg, and the duty of rendering
military service to the state in times of emergency conferred on
him the second type of prestige. The other important tenure in
Coorg was *sāgu*, in which not only was land assessed at ten rupees
per hundred *bhattis* of land, being twice the rate for *jamma* land,
but also the holder was liable to render every type of service to the
state except military service. During Richter's time, but for forty
Coorgs, all the people holding land on *sāgu* tenure were non-
Coorgs.¹

The Rājas occasionally granted land on *jamma* tenure to non-
Coorgs as a special mark of favour. Occasionally, Coorgs who held
land on *jamma* tenure were transferred to the *sāgu* class as punishment
for wrongs done by them.

VI

175 During the two centuries of rule by the Rājas, Coorg underwent
[631] a number of changes, political, administrative, and social. The
authority of the local chieftains or Nāyakas was destroyed and the
administration was centralized. The Rājas established a postal
[423] service (*anché*) for the use of officials only. Land was surveyed
thoroughly, and the type of tenure under which each farm was held
[671] was recorded in the *Hukum Nāma* of Linga Rāja II (1811-20). The
Hukum Nāma also contained a few paragraphs dealing with the
powers of officials to try cases, civil and criminal, without reference
to the Rāja. Serious offences like adultery, murder, and treason
[623] were tried by the Rāja himself. The recognition of the authority of
the headman of a village and his council of elders was a general
[623] feature of the administrative system of the Rājas. They also
recognized the authority of caste elders to try and settle caste
disputes.

186 The long and bitter struggle with Haider and Tippu increased
the sense of national identity of the inhabitants of Coorg. Coorgs
played an important part in this struggle as they formed the bulk
of the Rājas' soldiery, and also because they were specially selected
for barbarous treatment by Tippu Sultan.

¹ Op. cit., p. 406.

[p. 24]

II

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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[184] THE existence of subdivisions among Coorgs does not prevent them from regarding themselves, and from being regarded by others, as a single group. Coorgs consider themselves to be Kshatriyas, who constitute the caste of rulers and soldiers in the traditional hierarchy, and rank next only to Brahmins, who are priests and scholars. It is necessary to give here a very brief and general account of the caste system in order to make clear the implications of the Coorg claim to be Kshatriyas.

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2y [184] Caste is an institution of great complexity. It has its roots deep in history, and even today it governs the lives of 300 million Hindus in several important respects. It is popularly understood as the division of society into a fivefold hierarchy with the Brahmins at the head, followed in order by the Kshatriyas, Vaishyas or traders, Shūdras or servants and labourers, and, lastly, the Untouchables. The first three castes are called 'twice-born' (*dvija*) as they alone are entitled to undergo the ceremony of *upanayana* which constitutes spiritual rebirth. Only the twice-born castes are entitled to study the Vēdas and to the performance of Vēdic ritual on certain occasions. Caste in the above sense is referred to as *varṇa* and has an All-India application.

The idea of caste as the fivefold division of society represents a gross over-simplification of facts. The real unit of the caste system is not one of the five *varṇas*, but *jāti*, which is a very small endogamous group practising a traditional occupation and enjoying a certain amount of cultural, ritual, and juridical autonomy.

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[623] Every *jāti*, or the members of a *jāti* in a particular village or a group of neighbouring villages, constitutes a caste court which punishes caste offences.

There are innumerable *jātis*. Professor Ghurye calculates that there are 2,000 sub-castes (*jātis*) in each linguistic area.¹ This should give some idea of the total number of endogamous sub-castes in India as a whole. The importance of the *varṇa*-system

¹ *Caste and Race in India*, London, 1932, p. 27.

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a joint family speaking Kodagi while another speaks Kannada. 584
 Until recently Coorgs living south of Mercara had a prejudice against marrying those living in the north. The latter were regarded as inferior and derisively referred to as those living 'beyond the hills' (*boṭṭat mēlē*), the implication being that Coorgs south of Mercara were the best Coorgs. [186]

Coorgs formed a compact unit in relation to other castes. They possessed wealth and power, they liked dancing, competitive games involving the exercise of skill and strength, hunting, and soldiering. In the Vēdic or classical caste system these virtues are attributed to Kshatriyas, the caste of warriors and kings, who are next only to the Brahmin in the hierarchy. The resemblances between Coorgs and the Vēdic Kshatriyas are striking indeed in the matter of values, and it is understandable that Coorgs should regard themselves as Kshatriyas. But the classical Kshatriyas, as one of the three 'twice-born' castes, were entitled to perform certain rituals at which sacred verses (*mantras*) from the Vēdas were recited by the priests. Coorgs do not perform any of these rituals and Vēdic *mantras* are not recited when a Coorg is given a name, or marries, or dies. [796]

Coorgs, like other Caste Hindus, object very strongly to the eating of beef, and the strength of their objection was early recognized by the British who banned all slaughter of cattle for the table in Coorg in 1835. But the Coorg dietary includes pork and liquor, and this is occasionally singled out for comment by the other castes. The correlation between status and dietary is particularly strong in the interior of south India, and the Coorg claim to be considered as Kshatriyas comes up against this fact. Coorgs rightly point out that the Rajputs of north India eat pork and that this has not prevented them from being generally regarded as Kshatriyas. However, Rajputs eat only the wild pig and not the domesticated one. 262 554

In the Sanskrit myth (*Kāvēri Purāṇa* or *Kāvēri Māhātmya*) about the River Kāvēri, Coorgs are said to be Ugras,¹ or the descendants of the marriage of a Kshatriya prince and his Shūdra wife. The Kāvēri Myth thus cleverly reconciles the economic and 773

¹ Ugra means 'strong, formidable, terrible, violent, angry, passionate, cruel, fierce, pungent, hot, high and noble. It is also the name of a mixed tribe, descended from a Kshatriya father and Shudra mother, and of Malabar.' M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1899, p. 172.

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Coorgs and other Coorgs were not very frequent. Saṇṇa Coorgs 564
looked down upon Boḍḍu Coorgs whose customs and manners were 174
somewhat different from their own: differences between cognate
groups as to minute points of custom and ritual frequently come
to stand for the identity of each of them as against the others.
This is a common feature of caste.

A point which needs stressing because it is not very typical of 564
the caste system is the comparative ease with which Coorgs 174
admitted into their fold non-Coorgs belonging to fairly high castes. 186
Moegling wrote in 1855, 'strangers are received among them and
naturalised without difficulty, and such as have been excommuni-
cated are received without much ado'.¹ Richter, writing sixteen
years later, says that 'even within the memory of the present
generation strangers were received by and incorporated with the
Coorgs. There is now a dispute pending about six families in
Kiggatnāḍ, who ten years ago were, by the Head Sheristedar
Nanchappa, received as Coorgs, but after his death were expelled
from the clan [caste] by the rest of the people. The settlement of
the dispute will perhaps be only a matter of time. . . .'² Formerly
some families of Wynāḍ Chettis, Kannaḍa Okkaligas, and Tuḷu
Gauḍas were received into the Coorg fold. The complete absorp-
tion of recruits from other castes naturally took some time, and till
it was accomplished the conservative Coorg families did not freely
intermarry with the new recruits. Even now one hears a Coorg
elder saying, 'such-and-such a family are really Kannaḍa Okkaligas
who called themselves Coorgs 50 or 60 years ago. Until recently
Coorgs would think twice before inter-marrying with them.'

IV

There are more than forty main castes and tribes in Coorg, but 564
Coorgs come into intimate contact with only a few of them. A
very brief account of their relations with each of these castes will
now be given. It is important to add that the duties mentioned
against each caste might frequently be performed by similar castes
of equivalent status: for instance, it might be either a Tuḷu Brahmin
or Malabar Brahmin who performs the priestly duties at a village
temple, and the Tuḷu Brahmin is again split up into Shivallī and

¹ *Coorg Memoirs*, p. 55.² *Manual of Coorg*, pp. 231-2.

584 authors of the Myth saw an inconsistency between Coorg dietary,
 773 plus their failure to resort to Vedic ritual on certain occasions of
 life, and their high economic position and the profession of arms.
 The last two factors favoured their being considered Kshatriyas,
 while the first two factors did not. The situation was resolved
 ingeniously by their being considered the descendants of an inter-
 caste marriage.

584 Educated Coorgs are, however, certain that they are Kshatriyas.
 186 In 1902, Shri K. Appayya, a Coorg doctor in the employment of
 the Mysore Palace, wrote a book on Coorg customs in Kannaḍa,
 entitled *Koḍagara Kulāchārādi Tatvōjjivini*, and in this book he
 tried to derive every Coorg custom from the customs of the Vedic
 Kshatriyas. This tendency is a common one: educated Coorgs
 regard themselves as Indo-Aryans, descendants of the original
 Indo-Aryan immigrants into India.

IV

773 Sanskrit Hinduism has a vast mythology. There are the *itihāsas*
 773 which consist of the epics, Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. There are
 177 also the *purāṇas* which 'celebrate the powers and works of positive
 gods and represent a later and more extravagant form of Hinduism,
 of which they are in fact the Scriptures. The *purāṇas* are 18 in
 number, and in addition to these there are 18 *upa-purāṇas* or
 subordinate works None of them is devoted exclusively to one
 god, but Viṣṇu and his incarnations fill the largest space.'¹

The *purāṇas* are religious stories in which figure deities, and
 many semi-divine characters, and the public reading of the
purāṇas and epics is even now popular. The *purāṇas* have played
 a great part in the spread of Hinduism as ordinary people became
 familiar with deities and ideas of Sanskrit Hinduism through
 them. Even more important is the fact that the *purāṇas* facilitated
 the absorption of local myths and legends. (The Kāvēri Myth is
 part of the Skānda Purāṇa.) The *purāṇas* have been continually
 expanding, absorbing local myths and legends, and also weaving
 myths round great historical figures and events. Another importance
 of the *purāṇas* is that they bring purely local myths into the main
 stream and thus charge them with All-India significance. Thus,
 through the *purāṇas*, a local community becomes acquainted with

¹ J. Dowson, *Hindu Classical Dictionary*. Kegan Paul, 1914, pp. 255-7.

243 On New Year's Day a clod of ploughed earth is brought home
788 and deposited in the granary. When a man sees paddy in the ear for the first time, he goes home, stands before the granary, and says, 'I saw paddy in the ear, I saw paddy in the ear, do not be startled, do not be astonished, O granary.' He tells the granary that there is going to be a bumper harvest, a harvest that will burst the granary. At the Kāvēri festival, pilgrims carry home a handful of rice from the granary (called '*akshaya pātra*', the mythical vessel of increase) in the Bhagandēshwara temple. This rice is put into the domestic granary to ensure a bumper harvest.

Rice is essential to the Coorg's survival, and formerly it was also the chief source of wealth. Its cultivation is the most important activity in which the *okka*, the nuclear unit of Coorg society, is engaged, and the axis round which revolve other activities. A long drought as well as excess of rain is likely to ruin the crop. Rain is a friend only if it comes when wanted and keeps away when not wanted. Proper rains in sufficient quantities mean a good crop, and abundance of rice means food, wealth, and the ability to make sacrifices to ancestors and festivals in honour of deities. It gives one the means with which one can get one's sons and daughters married, to keep one's servants, to give the feasts which have to be given, and to perform other obligations. It is because of its enormous social importance that rice, and everything associated with it in any way, receives ritual attention.

II

538 In Coorg folklore, Malabar is referred to as the 'land of ignor-
186 ance' (*ajñāna bhūmi*), and this is presumably due to certain matri-
lineal castes living there. All the patrilineal peoples of south India seem to have regarded matriliney as a very odd custom. The people of the Kannaḍa and Tamil countries occasionally refer to Malabar as '*stri malayāla*', which means 'Malabar which is dominated by women'. There are myths which try to account for the oddness of Malabar: according to a myth which is widespread over the whole of south India, the entire Malabar coast was created by Para-shurāma, the great Brahmin enemy of Kshatriyas till he was finally defeated by the Kshatriya prince, Rāma, the hero of Rāmāyaṇa, and an *avatār* of Viṣṇu. The folktale on p. 221, which gives an account of a solitary act of disobedience on the part of Laksh-

maṇa towards his eldest brother Rāma, testifies to the utter ⁵³⁸ strangeness of Malabar. It is so strange that people setting foot in ¹⁸⁶ it behave in an unpredictable way. This is doubly proved by Lakshmaṇa's great act of contrition immediately on returning to Coorg.

In the folksongs, deities are frequently reported as having ⁵³⁸ migrated from Malabar or South Canara into Coorg. It is true that ⁷⁷⁶ the deities are created 'beyond the Seven Seas, on the shore of ¹⁸⁶ the Milk Sea', but they subsequently migrate to a town on the west coast, whence they proceed inland, towards Coorg, to seek shelter. In the story of the two deities, Achchaiah (m.) and Akkavva (f.), brother and sister, at first wander all over Malabar seeking shelter. They are directed to Coorg by some deities whom they went to in their search for shelter, and as soon as they cross into Coorg, Akkavva tells Achchaiah, 'O elder brother, when people see us wandering about together they will think that we are husband and wife, and not brother and sister. Let us take an escort with us'. Achchaiah accepts his sister's advice and takes a Poleyā servant. This incident raises the question, 'why did not Akkavva think of taking an escort before crossing over into Coorg'? It assumes that a person need not be particular about what he does in Malabar.

Educated Coorgs assert that Achchayya is a popular name for ⁷⁷⁶ Vishṇu, and Akkavva for Lakshmi. This makes out Achchaiah and Akkavva to be husband and wife, and not brother and sister—the precaution taken by Akkavva in the story was in vain! It is only one instance of Sanskritization producing an inconsistency. According to the general rule mentioned in the '*dēsha keṭṭ pāṣ*', there is a 'Mādēva (Mahādēva or Shiva) for every *nāḍ* and Povvedi (Bhagavati) for every village'. This rule is interpreted in such a way by Coorgs that every male village-deity who is not said to be a form of Vishṇu is said to be a form of Mādēva, and every female village-deity who is not said to be a form of Lakshmi is said to be a form of Bhagavati, wife of Mādēva. After giving the popular name of a village-deity, Coorgs frequently take care to add that 'he is *really* Vishṇu (or Shiva)'.

The story of the seven deities is relevant here. Seven deities, ⁷⁷⁶ six brothers and a sister, wandered all over Malabar in search of ⁵³⁹ shelter. The first three deities, Kānyarāṭappa, Tīrchembarappa, and Bendrukōlappa, found shelter in Malabar villages alone, while the remaining four went to Coorg in search of shelter. They crossed

142 distinguished for bravery. Apparently anticipating the pre-
 302 sent military regulation, they shave their chin but sport
 554 mighty whiskers! The colour of the Coorgs is lighter than
 might be expected under this latitude. Their mode of life
 186 and pride of race impart to their whole bearing an air of
 manly independence and dignified self-assertion, well sustained
 by their peculiar and picturesque costume.

291 The principal Coorg dress is a long coat (kupasa) of white
 411 or blue cotton or dark coloured cloth and even velvet. It
 reaches below the knees, is open in front, has, if not white,
 short sleeves under which longer ones of a different colour
 extend to the waist, and is held together by a red or blue sash
 of cotton or silk which is several times wound round the waist
 and which holds the never failing Coorg knife, with ivory or
 silver handle and chains of the same metal. A red kerchief
 or the peculiarly fashioned turban, which is large and flat at
 the top and covers a portion of the back of the neck, forms
 the head-dress. The feet are bare or protected with light
 301 sandals. A necklace of the berry of Rudrákshi (Elæocarpus
 ganitrus), silver or gold bracelets on the wrists, and silver
 and gold earrings with pearls or precious stones complete
 their festive costume. Those who are in possession of the
 Coorg-medal or the lunulate ornament called Kokaládi² do not
 fail to suspend it round their neck, as may be seen on the
 front-illustration. Their every day dress is of course of a
 more simple nature. The Coorg warrior looks more imposing.

714 His dress is of the same cut, but of coarser material and
 411 shorter. In addition to his handy waist-knife (Picha-katti),
 he wears on his back in a strong clasp of brass the curved,
 broad-bladed Coorg knife (Odu-katti) which is seen in the
 147 hand of the figure in our illustration. In a hand-to-hand
 527 fight it was a most formidable weapon and since the young
 Coorgs have no longer Mussulman or Nair antagonists to
 decapitate, they display at their feasts the strength of their

¹ [Errata: This should read "wrist". See
 corrigenda, Cat. 116; P. 473 -- Analyst]
² [Errata: This should read "Kokaládi." -- Analyst]

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[564] ago were, by the Head-Sheristadar Nanchappa, received as Coorgs, but after his death were expelled from the clan by the rest of the Coorg people. The settlement of the dispute will perhaps be only a matter of time, but not of intrinsic caste spirit which as such is inconsistent with the notorious Coorg practice of assimilating cognate tribes into one clan, and with the fact, that during the Seringapatam captivity of thousands of Coorg families by Tippu Sultan, most of them were forcibly made Mussulmans and, though on the return to their country, they abjured Islam, the very process of circumcision deprived them of their previous caste—in a brahminical sense—and rendered that of their descendants defective. The renown of the Coorgs lies certainly not in the purity and antiquity of their genealogy, but in the union and strength of so many discordant elements into one compact body or clan, that bravely fought on every occasion of danger for the honour and safety of their adopted country, whether under the leadership of their own Náyakas or their alien Rájahs, and there can be no doubt that they would in time of need, with equal loyalty rally round the standard of their English Rulers!

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[648] To the question, how such a conglomerate of divers tribes could have been formed into an almost homogenous body, I would reply, that what might perhaps have been impossible amongst a civilized and politically powerful state, was a comparatively easy process in a small uncivilized and secluded hill-country, which, seldom influenced by the politics of its more powerful neighbours, and in blissful ignorance undisturbed by subtle religious disputes, vented its savage strength in intestine feuds, till the despotic hand of the alien usurper subjected the turbulent chiefs, and united them and their adherents in deadly combat against common foes or for marauding expeditions. Their defeats as well as their achievements originated and strengthened national sympathies which time matured into a healthy spirit of clan-ship, that asserted

itself the stronger, the narrower its local limits were confined, 619
 and the less it came into civilizing contact with surrounding 186
 nations. With the ascendancy of the Ikeri princes in Coorg, 175
 who spoke Canarese, this language became the written official 643
 medium and counteracted the Malayalam influence; but, how- 175
 ever great the latter may have been through the intellectual 648
 superiority of the Malayalam people over the savage Coorg
 mountaineers, who dreaded their supposed supernatural powers,
 it never laid a beneficial hold on the Coorg mind by imparting
 the means of acquiring knowledge in the Malayalam tongue.
 It is true the horoscopes which the Kanyas wrote and still (787)
 write for the Coorgs are in the Malayalam language, but they
 are unintelligible to the Coorgs. Thus it was left to the
 Coorg Rájahs of the Ikeri house to mould or rather to dis-
 figure the Coorg mind into the character in which the English
 found it on their assumption of the Government in 1834;
 that it was of the most pitiable description, we have enough
 evidence to adduce: Lieut. Connor describes thus the condition 175
 of the people under Lingaraja—and the picture applies 643
 equally well to the times of his predecessor and of the late
 Rájah—: "The chief of Codagur exercises an authority, that
 knows no restraint. He shares in common with the gods,
 the homage of the people and a more than ordinary portion
 of eastern humiliation is observed towards him; he is appro-
 ched with a reverence due alone to the deity and addressed
 with all the servility fear could yield, or despotism claim;
 in his presence, in which no subject dare be seated or indeed
 within the precincts of his fort, the subject clasps his hands
 as in the act of prayer—the last sign of slavish vassalage—and
 he is accosted in a language quite correspondent with this
 suppliant attitude; his subjects know no duty more imperious
 than attending to his mandates, which received with veneration
 are executed with singular precision, and his projects of
 whatever nature seconded without enquiry; nor would the